

MUNDANE BEAUTY: FEMALE FASHION OF COSTUMES ADDRESSING DRAPES AND FOLDS AS FASHION DEVICES USED IN FEMALE COSTUMES DURING 16TH CENTURY IN SRI LANKA

PRIYANKA VIRAJINI MEDAGEDARA KARUNARATNE

Senior Lecturer in Fashion Design & Product Development, Department of Textile & Clothing Technology,
Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Costumes have always been a distinctive mark of a historical period. Besides, wearing costumes in a pleasing manner is a skill of great antiquity and it was well developed since the development of creative impulses of people. It was evident that during the Kotte period in Sri Lanka (1408-1594AD) the level of sophistication in the method of draping and creating folds used in costumes were very complex because its basic potentiality lay beyond the visual appeal of the costume. The objective of this article is to identify the complex methodology of arranging wads of fabrics in female body contours in order to emphasize feminine beauty. The pictorial references of ivory carvings show unique forms and shapes of draping composed in female royalty and court dancers.

KEYWORDS: Court Dancers, Draping, Fashion Devices, Female Royalties, Kotte Period

INTRODUCTION

Draping wad of fabric over the lower body of female body converts the edge of a piece of fabric into mini –folds bunched together create solid edge of dress. Vertical folds increased the apparent height of the wearer and highlighted the full extent of the fabric erupts into irregular rolling folds. The layers of lower dresses of female are suggested by lines and deep carving descending from its length of layers. The dresses are styled with many folds. It is very important to observe how the dress of the lower body is arranged as it the way depicted in female dancing and female royal dresses of sculptures. Coomaraswamy (1948, 195) states, 'needless to remark, there is much art in wearing garments which are not fastened by any stitch, pin or knot'.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Relief carvings in two special ivory carved boxes presently at the Munich Treasury in Germany of represented court dances and female royalties and wood carving of female royalty from Rambawa at Aludeniya in Gampola, Sri Lanka there dressed bodies were identified and analyzed according to their lower body draperies. The conceptual framework of the study is based on the qualitative research method. A sequence of in-depth observational studies was carried out to identify the method of draping of female costumes. The literature review employed original documents, manuscripts, chronicles and records of foreign travellers. By triangulating data the validity was confirmed. The study was carried out to gather, sort and analyze data in a systematic manner that revealed how drapes played an important role in arranging the lower body costume without using single stitch or single pin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Representation of Original Dress Fashions: Two Ivory Caskets

The dress in historical times reveals curious, tantalizing cultural phenomena which signify their complex origins. Two Ivory caskets of the Kotte period at present in the Residenz Munich, Schatzkammer, Germany (casket no 1- Inventory no 1241, 18x 30x 16cm and casket no 2, Inventory No 1242, 15x 25x14cm) provide an interesting representation of period costumes inspired both by Portuguese and South Indian culture. These two caskets are said to have been produced under the patronage of King Buwanekabahu VII (1521-1551AD) the eldest son of Vijayabahu VI (1513- 1521 AD) who sent a delegation to Lisbon carrying an image of prince Dharmapala (1551-1597 AD) with the intention of having it crowned to ensure the succession of prince Dharmapala to the Kotte throne.

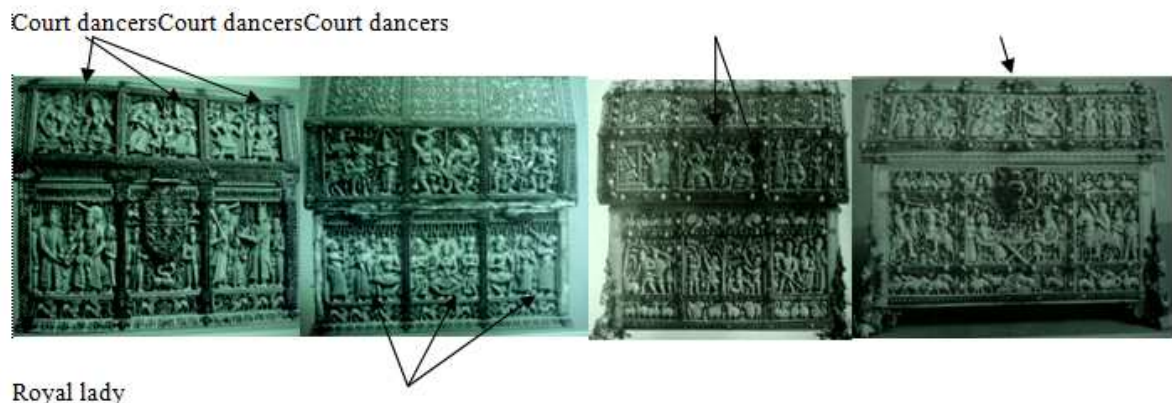


Figure 1: Casket No 01-1241, 18x 30x 16cm

Figure 2: Casket No 02-1242, 15x 25x14cm

- **Definition: Costume**

In discussing the costumes one needs to understand the meaning of costumes. Kaiser (1997, 4) defines costumes as a style of clothes belonging to a particular cultural or historical context. He further explains that it is often used to refer to ethnic or historical clothing as well as clothing designed for performances or rituals such as drama.

- **Costumes and Cultural Impact**

The costumes of the Kotte period were well developed artistically. Some of them stand out in the period costumes found in history. Their external appearance is an indication of their cultural origin. De Silva (1981: 93) has noted that 'although South Indian influence was very prominent in the Polonnaruwa period (12th Century) onwards it was deeper rooted in every aspect of the Kotte kingdom than ever before. The upper crust of the Sinhalese society was fast becoming Hindu in outlook'. Similarly Schroeder (1990:146) has stated that the 'Kotte caskets do not represent an indigenous tradition and were certainly influenced by South Indian works.' These two statements go to show that in the Kotte period South Indian influence was strong on the upper strata of the society.

Introduction to the Royal Female Costume

The traditional Queen's dress was composed of a piece of long cloth and bare upper body with adorning abundance of jewelry. Nandasena Mudiyanse observed the dress quite differently. He stated that 'consorts of the kings were shown without any kind of headdress. They usually wore a hair knot at the back. Breasts are prominent and obviously a jacket is worn. The lower body was covered with a long piece of cloth with graceful folds. These folds

probably survive in modern times in the form of the *neriya* (frills attached to one side of the waist) of the *Kandy an saree*. From the waist of the female is seen hanging loosely a strip of cloth gradually broadening towards the end. A threefold belt most probably of cloth, holds the garment fastened to the body of the lady' (Mudiyanse, n.d:105)

It is quite noticeable that during the Kotte period the lower dress of the Queen had not acquired many changes rapidly in the early and middle stages of the sixteenth century. The full dress of a Queen was completed with the lower dress, upper body jewelry, armlets, anklets, belts, necklace, earrings, and headdress.

- **Complex Methodology of Arranging the Lower Body Dress of Queens**

There were several styles of lower dress created by the manipulation of a silk cloth or *helaya*. The length of the dress is long, up to the ankle. The cloth or the *helaya* created a definite dress form by wrapping well the contours of the lower body. Several wrappings around the posterior caused a voluminous rear part. To create the lower dress differently by adding layers of folds it more than one piece of cloth had to be used. The styles of the lower dresses show some different tastes of the Queens. Finally, the dress was confined to the waist by wearing a belt. Ultimately the abdominal part of each female is shown as rather bulky because several swathes of fabric were gathered in the hip area.

- **Inspirational Costume from the South Indian Queen**

The Queens from South India wore lower dresses formed by central pleated folds. They are arranged in a decorative style with fan- shaped ends. The style of the lower dress is called *sakaccha* (Kumari, 1995: 34) style. The dress is confined by a waist band which has many strings with some gems or types of beads. She covered her shoulder partly with a piece of cloth. However the body shape was enhanced by wrapping a transparent cloth.

- **Wraps and Drapes: The Style Variations of Royal Female Costumes**

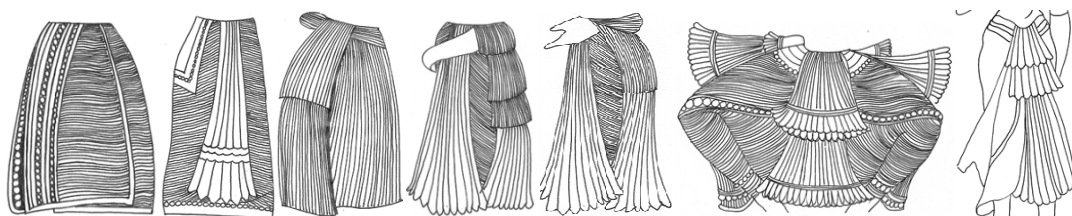


Figure 3 Figure 4 Figure 5 Figure 6 Figure 7 Figure 8 Figure 9

Casket no 1 Casket no 1 Casket. No 2 Casket. No 2 Casket. No 1 Right end Rear view Door jamb of the gable left in the corner panel Top right slanting panel Rear viewmiddle panel Gampola

Figure 3 The lower dress seems very simple. It can be identified as a piece of cloth called the *helaya* simply wrapped around the waist. One end of the cloth is tied to the inside cord tightly to the waist and that other end wrapped around the body and tucked to the other side of the hip. Then the decorated front piece of the *helaya* appeared as decorative fold. However there was no indication of pulled out folds that were arranged onto the waist as *neriya*(side frills). In *Sandesa* poetry (special type of poetry developed during 14th Century with influence of South India) the *neriya* is mentioned as “*naru*” however Silva and Wijayasriwardena (1953: 148) interpreted as *asnaru* an arrangement of fascinating frills in the centre of the lower dress which was done up by bunching the two edges of the cloth (*salu*) in to the centre of the lower dress’.

Figure 4 Here the fashion style of the lower dress is depicted with a significant detail called *neriya*. This was the

period which could be traced as the era in vogue of introducing the *neriya*. The front of the long cloth is arranged as a fan shaped fold.

Figure 5 The style of the lower dress is consisted of a cloth waist band. The folds are arranged into the one side of the waist by two layers. The layers of side folds are also considered to be a form of *neriya* but arranged quite differently.

Figure 6 & 7 The lower dress is depicted in the 2nd casket in Munich Here the details of the *neriya* seem to be formed much smaller on both waist sides. The long cloth is wrapped in a simple manner from right to left. The fashion of the dress seems very different to the other styles. The novel arrangement of the pleated fan shaped folds added grace to the appearance of the wearer. The three layers of folds were arranged to the side of the dress underneath with a pleated fold. The front fold is also pleated and fan shaped. An indication of the waist band looks very different in character due to the way it is wrapped.

Figure 8 This style is also another variation of above the discussed style. However the waist band seems to have two surface characters. It is wrapped in a crushed manner and ultimately shows a more plain character. The side folds are created by two layers with an underneath pleated fan shaped fold. The lower dress was fully composed of folds. The central fold is two layered with a design at the fringe. A prominent geometric pattern was embodied on the narrow border across the dress. The border of the central fold is echoed with the border in the side folds. The arrangement of the narrow border shows that the lower dress would have been composed with one piece of cloth. The surface texture depicted in horizontal lines suggests expansion of the fabric. There were some folds on both sides of the waist. The fold of the lower dress is apparently confined by a decorative waist band with decorated designs.

Figure 9 The basic form of this dress shows a continuation of ancient dress form which had evolved from the Anuradhapura period. The lower dress comprises two pieces of cloth and the front arrangement of folds is defined by long layers up to the ankle. Each fold is emphasized the body contour as well as the height of the wearer. These folds might have been worn as separate dress articles. At the initial stage the long cloth might have been wrapped around the waist. Then in the next stage the folds might have been worn as layers in pleated and crushed manner. The bottom of the fold is expanding like a fan. Usually the whole dress was tightened at the waist by a fabric belt. After finishing her dressing the abdominal area of the woman seems bulky because it is wrapped around and gathered with several wads of fabrics. Mudiyanse (n.d, 105) observed the Queen's dress and stated 'the lower body is covered with a long piece of cloth with graceful folds. These folds probably survive in modern times in the form of the *neriya*, of the *Kandyan saree*. From the waist of females is seen hanging loosely a strip of cloth gradually broadening towards the end. A threefold belt most probably of cloth holds the garment fastened to the body of the lady.

• Court Dancers and Their Significance

The dance costumes represented in the ivory caskets of the time also shed some light on dance forms in Kotte. As shown above the literature of the time shows that dance was a strong cultural phenomenon. It was a part of cultural ceremonies in two different contexts, secular and religious. Secular dance can be identified as the dance for aristocratic circles, and dance for public. Religious dance was in honor of the gods. Dance was also incorporated into the king's court as an amusement or way of recreation of the king's life style since early times. Every King had a dance company. Dancers performed with considerable professional skill in front of appreciative audiences at the King's court.

- **Drapes Created Folds: The Style Variations of Folds in Dance Costumes in Ivory Caskets**



Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Casket no 01-1241 Casket no 02 – 1242

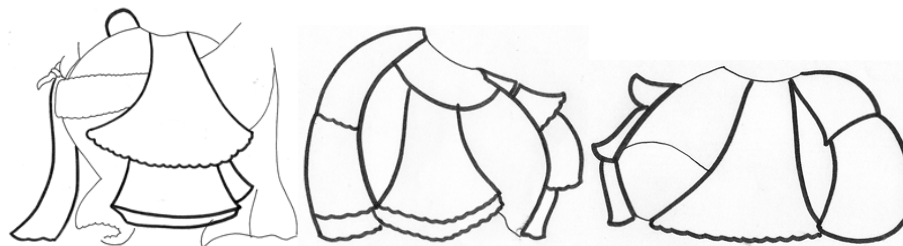


Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Casket No 02 - 1242

(The dark bold lines of the illustrations emphasize the Fold)

The costumes in the ivory caskets were styled with many folds and show much greater developed folds. The layers of lower costumes are suggested by lines and deep carving descending from its length of layers. The method of arranging layers of folds to the lower dress could be understood by careful observation of these costumes. The lower dress was formed by more than one piece of cloth to get layers of folds. The dress was fitted to the waist by a belt. It seems that folds would have been worn separately. The dancer arranged it according to her sense of dressing. The fold depicted along with its pleated texture. There are two methods of forming folds identified within this dress range. These are overlap and wrap. Folds depicted in the dance costumes show how they manipulate the fabric to express creative forms within the fabric. Quinn (2003:35) stated, 'fold constitutes a move from effective to affective spaces; folding is a description of activity, intended to flow smoothly and continually with no evidence of ambiguity of interruption'. A fold in the front is represented in two layers. Also there was less prominence given to the fold attached to the hip. Timeless and stylistic in its appeal the fold was an aspect of the dance costumes. The folds have been worn differently according to the contours of the body as follows.

- **Folds Worn on Either Side of the Hip Area**

Suspended linear folds in tiers as two or three layers placed below the navel area (Figures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16).

- **Folds Worn on the Navel Area**

The arrangement of placing folds below the navel area is quite similar in all dresses. In two dresses (Figures 15, 16) the center fold has only one suspending fold. The other dresses have two layers of centre folds. These folds reached to the ankle it intended also to increase the height of the dancer. Exquisite pleats are aligned in folds. This generates a sense of continuity. When the legs are expanded along the rhythm fold it expanded simultaneously. It emphasizes the width of the

skirt.

- **Styles of Drapes**

The word style means “a distinctive characteristic or way of expression”. Style in costumes describes the lines that distinguish one form or shape from another. (Keiser, 1998: 4) Accordingly style must have certain features. There are two ivory caskets in which eleven female dancers are represented. Casket. no 1 shows four lower dress styles on the top slanting panel and casket. no 2 shows two types of lower costumes in the front top middle panel and the rear view, top middle and altogether six distinctive styles each with unique features.

Rhythm is the essence of dance costumes and is also enhanced by extended frills, long chords, and layers of pleats, wads of pleats, detailed fringe, and decorated hem lines. Therefore the style of the dance costumes is not to be thought of as something independent of movement. Movement and garments are conceived as a single whole

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drapery was given subtle structural form to the feminine body in a pleasing manner during the Kotte period. Vertical folds of the costumes worn by the royal female and the court dancers evoke the real beauty of the female body by well-shaped body contours. The gracefulness or the impressiveness arises because of the tension created between the plumb- downward drapery of the costume and absolutely straight posture of the upper body of the females. These draperies in costumes are evidence that Classical drapery performed such structural functions as to reveal the body. The female body was revealed only by the differing positions of the legs kept by the dancers. Incidentally it is also seen that the drapery and folds of costumes are emphasizing the body movements and caress its contours. In reality the relation between the classical female body and its drapery is somehow always more complex. During the Kotte period female drapery and folds of costumes gained their peak and made visible the dialect of cloth and the body as the secret of costumes of Kotte, as it may have been the key to gestures and manners of female fashionable costumes of the period. In addition to a deliberate attempt at design, the form and the structures were changed and organized by internal explicit design units as pleating, knotting, folding, frilling, and tucking. The dancer arranged the folds according to their aesthetic sense. Folds depicted in fashions of dance costumes show how it manipulates the fabric to express creative forms within the fabric. ‘Fold constitutes a move from effective to affective spaces; folding is a description of activity, intended to flow smoothly and continually with no evidence of ambiguity of interruption’. Dynamic drapes and folds give life to large piece of fabric thus evoke many interesting silhouette concepts for ever.

REFERENCES

1. Coomaraswamy, A. (1984), The arts and crafts of India and Ceylon, New Delhi. Today & tomorrow’s printers& publishers.
2. Deraniyagala, P.E.P. (1959), Some Sinhala Combative Field and Aquatic Sports and Games, Colombo. National Museum.
3. Geiger, W. (1960) Culture of Ceylon in the Medieval Times. Wiesbaden: Heinz Bechert.
4. Huntington, Susan. L. (1985), The Art of Ancient India, New York. Weather hill.
5. Jaffer, Amin. & Schwabe, and Anne. Melanie. (1999), “A group of 16TH Century Ivory Caskets from Ceylon

(Article) pp 1-14 Appllo Art the international magazine of the oriental art.

6. Keiser, B. Susan. (1998), The Social Psychology of Clothing, New York. Fairchild Publication.
7. Knox, R (1966) Historical Relation of Ceylon. Dehiwala: Tissara Publications.
8. Kulasuriya, S. Anada. (1976), "Regional Independence and Elite Change in the Politics of 14th – century Sri Lanka(Article) Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain Ireland, No 02.
9. Kumari, Nirmala. Y. (1995), Social Life as Reflected in Sculptures and Paintings of the Late Vijayanagar Period, Madras. T.R publications Pvt Ltd
10. Mudiyanse, Nadasena, n.d, The Art and Architecture of Gampola Period, Colombo. M.D Gunasena.
11. Paranavithana, S. (1960) Gampola and Raigama Civilization of Past.University of Ceylon History Ceylon. Colombo: Vol 1.636-745
12. Quinn, Bradley. (2003), The Fashion of Architecture, United Kingdom. Berg publishers
13. Raghavan, M. D. (1967), Sinhala Natum, Colombo. M.D Gunasena & co Ltd.
14. Schroeder, U, Von. (1990), Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Visual Dharma Publications.
15. Seneviratne, Anuradha. (1984), Traditional Dancers of Sri Lanka, Colombo.Central Cultural Fund
16. Silva, K.H. De and AbhayasingheWijayasriwardhane. (1953), Sinhala SandeshaVicharaya, Colombo. Malcom book shop
17. Silva, K.M. De. (1981), A History of Sri Lanka, Delhi. Oxford University Press
18. Silva, Nimal. De. (1998), Art and Crafts of Kotte, Battaramulla. Cultural Department
19. Silva, Nimal. De. (1998) Art and Crafts of Kotte, Battaramulla. Cultural Department
20. Silva, P.H.D.H. De. (1974), A Catalogue of Antiquities and other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka and Abroad, Colombo. National Museum of Sri Lanka

